VIDEO-BASED
6-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

ACT LIKE MEN

THE BIBLE STUDY

JAMES MACDONALD

LifeWay
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JAMES MACDONALD
WITH NEIL WILSON

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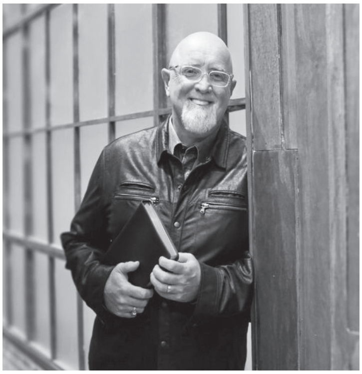
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMES MACDONALD (D. Min. Phoenix Seminary) has committed his life to the unapologetic proclamation of God's Word. He is the founder and Senior Pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel which began in 1988 with eighteen people and now welcomes thirteen thousand people to its seven Chicago-area campuses each week.

His practical Bible teaching is heard daily around the world on radio and TV through the program *Walk in the Word*, and more than one hundred and seventy churches have been planted on four continents under Dr. MacDonald's leadership. He continues to recruit, train, and equip pastors to plant Vertical Churches through Mission Harvest and the Vertical Church Pastor Training Center.

James's extensive ministry also includes the worship and songwriting ministry Vertical Worship, the film-making ministry Vertical Church Films, the accredited Pre-K through grade twelve Harvest Christian Academy, a year-round camp, and a center for biblical counseling.

James has authored several books and Bible studies, including: *Act Like Men*; *Vertical Church*; *Lord, Change Me*; *Lord, Change My Attitude*; *When Life is Hard*; *Always True*; and most recently, *The Will of God IS the Word of God*.

James and Kathy are thrilled to be close to their seven grandchildren and three adult children, who serve alongside them in ministry.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT JAMES AND HIS MINISTRIES AT:

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WELCOME TO *ACT LIKE MEN*

I'll keep this short, because after years of hanging out with men, preaching to men, and even longer being a man myself, I realize that brevity gets to a man's heart and mind sometimes even faster than the food route. Act Like Men *isn't theoretical; it's practical. It's doing it, making mistakes, learning lessons, and continuing to act like men even, and especially, when we are overwhelmed by how far we still have to go to get it right.*

I've called this a field manual because the words workbook, guide, and even journal didn't quite get the job done. Field manual implies you're at it. You're engaged and committed. The decision to act like a man has already been made, and you are paying attention to what is required every day. You are no longer parked by the road (or stuck in the ditch), but you're in the traffic of daily life, looking for the signs that will keep you on the narrow path.

If you're tracking with me, you will be amazed that after decades of studying Scripture, I was shocked the first time I read two verses tucked into the last chapter of 1 Corinthians. They waited there a long time to hit my life like four thunder booms and a bolt of lightning. Memorize these verses because they will recalibrate your thinking and give you a jolt of truth every time you wonder what God expects from you as a man.

> *Be watchful,*
> *stand firm in the faith,*
> *act like men,*
> *be strong.*
> *Let all that you do be done in love.*
> **1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14**

As you engage with this field manual on your own and with other men, I'm praying you will let these five phrases become the description of your life, not perfectly, but increasingly. God not only expects you to act like a man; He is powerfully eager to help you do it (Phil. 1:6).

So, act like men.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR *ACT LIKE MEN* FIELD MANUAL

When it comes to acting like men, there's a major "on-your-own" part and a major "with-other-guys" part of the plan. Guys that fail to act like men have often tried to go it alone. Over and over again in the Bible when Satan wants to do serious damage, he goes after a man alone. So, a band of brothers is crucial. But sometimes guys have failed to act like men because they are spending too much time with other men who have no interest in acting like men. This field manual offers you help for when you're going it alone and when you're with other committed men.

GROUP SESSIONS

Make it a priority to be there. Don't miss the opportunity to work together with other guys on this challenge to act like men. Bring your questions to the sessions, and discover how other guys are dealing with the same issues you are. Do the follow-through exercises and come ready to share what you are discovering.

THE BIBLE

The instruction and directives found in *Act like Men* didn't come out of a focus group, and they aren't the result of creative musings on my part. They are from God, recorded in Scripture. Each of the five phrases from 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 summarizes an entire range of actions or skills that the rest of God's Word can clarify for you. Keep your Bible open and close by during these studies. God can and will guide you through His Word.

FOLLOW-THROUGH

I like to golf. Playing golf reminds me a lot of the process of acting like men. Every time I address the ball, regardless of where I landed from my previous shot, is a new test of attention and technique. No shot is automatic. You can never phone in a swing. And one of the critical, often overlooked aspects of every shot is the follow-through. A great-looking swing downward can go terribly wrong in the follow-through. This could vividly explain why the ball went somewhere radically different than the target.

The follow-through principle applies to many sports, but it applies most critically to life. The three follow-through exercises after each group session are designed to help you reflect on and act on what you learn in the group time. They are intended to guide you as you internalize and apply each of the phrases in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14. Don't skip the follow-throughs.

At the end of each set of follow-through exercises, you will find a notation about parallel content in the book *Act Like Men*.

ACT LIKE MEN BOOK

A valuable companion, *Act Like Men* is a book by the same title published by Moody Publishers. It contains a forty-day series of devotionals created to help you think through the various aspects of acting like men. I realized a long time ago that I couldn't expect men to be honest about themselves and their inner struggles unless I was willing to be honest about mine. Writing that book reminded me over and over again of how far God has brought me, but it also confronted me with how far I still have to go. By God's grace through faith I am a saved man, still working out my salvation with fear and trembling, as I trust Him in all things to help me increasingly act like His man. I trust you will rise to that same challenge.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

CHECK OUT A LESSON

Familiarize yourself with the session components:

- **Watch:** Each session begins with a brief teaching video from James MacDonald. We have noted some key statements from each video and listed them as fill-in-the-blank statements on the viewer guides. We've included the answers to the blanks on page 95.

- **Group Discussion:** The video teaching is followed by a time for men to process and discuss what they heard. Several questions and discussion prompts are provided.

- **Follow-through:** There are three follow-through exercises following each session to reinforce what was taught in the teaching videos and group sessions. These are to be completed between the group sessions.

PREVIEW THE VIDEO

Watch the teaching video before each session in order to be able to field questions and lead the discussion more calmly and confidently.

PRAYER

Spend time in prayer as you prepare to lead your group. After you have the names of your group members, pray for each one by name. Find different ways to use prayer in each session, including opening and closing as well as praying for needs that arise. Also provide time for men to pray together in twos or small groups.

PROVIDE RESOURCES

As you prepare for each session, take note of any resources (Bible verses, books, articles) that might help you and the other men in your group understand and apply the truth.

EMPHASIZE ENCOURAGEMENT

Look for opportunities to encourage. Appreciate transparency on the part of group members. Understand how risky it is, and affirm those who are willing to share.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Don't ask the group to do anything you haven't already done or aren't willing to do.

FOLLOW UP

Touch base with the guys in your group outside of the group session. Text them with encouragement. Call if you sense they are struggling.

EVALUATE

Take a few minutes to evaluate after each session. Maybe even ask a group member to give his input. Think through the following questions: *What could be done better? How is the group responding? What are some examples of progress?*

WEEK 1

INTRO

COMPLETE THE VIEWER GUIDE BELOW AS YOU WATCH TEACHING SESSION 1.

WHAT IS *ACT LIKE MEN*?

1. It began as a ______________________________.

2. It was a ______________________ ______________________.

3. It was a _________________________________.

4. It became a _______________________________.

WHAT DOES *ACT LIKE MEN* MEAN?

1. Don't act like a __________________________.

2. Don't act like an __________________________.

3. Don't act like a ______________________.

4. Don't act like a ______________________________.

DISCUSS

DISCUSS THE VIDEO TEACHING WITH YOUR GROUP.

1. Our culture seems to hold or portray two standards when it comes to men: 1) How men *should* act, and 2) how men *do* act. The first standard can be positive and challenging. The second leans toward being negative and demeaning, especially from what we see in media. What behaviors would you say the culture assigns to each of those two categories?

   - How men *should* act:

   - How men *do* act:

2. What man in your life best exemplifies authentic manhood? What qualities in this man's life prompted you to choose him?

3. If you could go back and explain to a much younger you what it means to act like a man, what would you include in your explanation?

4. In our culture, what rites of passage or moments mark when and how a boy becomes a man? To what degree are those experiences true markers of becoming a man?

5. In what situations are you most likely to find yourself asking, "What would an authentic man do right now?"

6. When and how did you become a man? Do you think there's a role for other men to play in helping someone else reach manhood? Explain.

7. How can the rest of us pray for you this week as we start on this journey to act like men together?

NOTES

WEEK 1

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Pick up your Bible. If you mainly use a Bible app on your phone, indulge me for a few minutes and get your paper and print Bible. Hold it in your hands. Look closely at it. The Bible is a book and yet so much more, in similar fashion to how a piece of paper is just paper until you realize it's also a love note from your wife. You can treat the Bible as just a book until you realize at gut level that it is filled with stuff God really wants you to know. You may not think you need to know a lot of it, but since it is from God, what you think about its contents doesn't matter—you need to know it.

Find 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in your Bible, and read it out loud to yourself. I could print those verses here, but that would defeat my purpose—to get you to open God's Word. Those two verses tell you how the Bible came to be, four ways it is useful (or profitable), and why it is crucial in learning to act like men. Now take three minutes to write, in the space provided, everything God brings to mind as you meditate on the phrase: "that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

FOLLOW-THROUGH 1:
A MAN OF GOD

In the group session, we talked about the different views our culture brings to the phrase "act like men." Some expectations are negative ("Men are naturally slobs.") and some are positive. ("Men should take care of their families.") We approach the phrase "act like men" with a particular context in mind. For our discussion, we want to focus on the word *men*. Our phrase actually means, *act like (a certain kind of) men*. This week we want to think about specific traits or qualities that God includes (or excludes) in His expectations for the kind of men we ought to be.

Review the four "don't act like" statements from the teaching video. Which of these statements presents you with the most significant challenge right now? Why? What needs to change?

What not to do is a helpful starting place or turning point, but it doesn't give you a lot of direction. Knowing what not to do or what you have to stop doing begs the question: So what *should* I do? For those answers, we turn to Scripture.

> [14]*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly*
> *believed, knowing from whom you learned it* [15]*and how from child-*
> *hood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are*
> *able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* [16]*All*
> *Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof,*
> *for correction, and for training in righteousness,* [17]*that the man of God*
> *may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
>
> **2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17**

Yes, I know you've already looked at verse 17, but we've got to get this passage nailed down if we're going to be serious about acting like men. I've left the verse numbers in so we can talk about specific verses. This passage is all about what it takes to be a quality man, a man of God.

First, a little background. This passage is part of a letter the apostle Paul wrote to a young man named Timothy. Paul sent Timothy out as his messenger and his representative on the ground. This letter includes many instructions and much encouragement for Timothy and, by extension, for us.

In verses 14-15, circle all the words that have to do with understanding and grasping an important concept. (Hint: You should be able to find at least five.) In the space provided, write these two verses in your own words.

Paul reminded Timothy of the most important and basic truth about being a man of God: "salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15). In two weeks, we'll begin to look at how to "stand firm in the faith." But before we can *stay and stand* in the faith, we have to be *in* it. At his core, a man of God is a man who knows he is saved by God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Here's my question to you right now: Are you such a man? Do you know you are saved by God through faith in Christ Jesus? I'm not asking if you have some kind of understanding of how salvation happens. I'm asking if you've experienced it yourself. In another passage, Paul described the necessary response to Christ this way: "'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom. 10:8-10).

In the space provided, briefly describe the moment when you believed in your heart and confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.

If you have to honestly say, *I've really never done that,* please know that you can do it right now. If you sense God's Spirit calling you to give your life to Christ, don't hesitate. If you're not sure where to start, you can pray the following prayer to express your repentance of sin and faith in Christ: *God, I recognize that I am a sinner, and I can't save myself. I realize that's why Jesus came to die in my place on the cross. I accept His sacrifice on my behalf and confess that He is Lord of my life. I acknowledge that You raised Jesus from the dead and that He lives today and can enter my life by His Spirit right now. I gladly welcome Him. Thank You, Lord, for saving me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

If you just prayed that prayer of faith and repentance, you need to tell someone—confess with your mouth that Jesus is now your Lord and Savior. Call up someone you know who is a follower of Jesus and simply tell him, "I trusted Christ as my Savior and Lord today." You will make his day!

Back to 2 Timothy 3 for a moment. I know you've already read and thought some about verse 17, but I don't want you to miss the act like men connection in this verse. Once you are a man of God by faith in Christ, it's time to immerse yourself in God's Word so that you can become "complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). The word *complete* doesn't mean finished, but rather "in fit shape or condition."[1] Men who act like God's men are continually growing more capable and competent in the truth, being equipped for the work of Christ. If this study has its intended effect on your life, it won't be the finishing touch. Men who act like men are works in progress, and God is doing the work. They are increasingly demonstrating what God can do in someone's life. I trust you are up for an amazing adventure!

FOLLOW-THROUGH 2: *A QUALITY MAN*

I have never met a dude who didn't want to be a quality man at some level. But for some reason, most every man, in the pressure of the moment, caves to behavior he despises. Why do so many men desperately want to build a loving, loyal, God-fearing family but watch in horror as their choices work contrary to the very things they say matter most? Too often men tear down with their own hands the good that they set out to build. We easily recognize the phrase "his own worst enemy," because it applies to men with staggering frequency. What is wrong with us? Why do the biblical words, "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7:15b) resonate so strongly with us? The answer is found much deeper than just our behavior. The problem is in our very nature, and only Christ can free us. As men, we are broken and don't work right; we have fallen and can't get up. Like a mag wheel on a low-profile sports car that's been bent rolling over a curb at high speed, the fix is possible but not easy.

> **How do you relate personally to this picture of bentness? In what areas of your life have you found yourself doing exactly what Paul described in the verse above—failing to do what you know you ought and doing what you shouldn't? Explain.**

Welcome to the history of men. You're part of it. Here's how the damage was done. Adam, the first man, was declared by God to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31) just after the Creator breathed life into him. But Adam's intentional rebellion in the garden propelled him and the whole human race into what theologians call depravity (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 5:12-14). Depravity is the essence of our fallen nature and the state we remain in apart from an intervention by Christ. Depravity means we are unable to choose the right, and we live with a constant inclination toward selfish sin. Like a cowlick that sticks up no matter how many times you slick it back, our nature as men is boldly bent toward badness. Two powerful, sinful

tendencies lie at the root of our bad bent. We must conquer them in Christ if we are to become quality men.

The two tendencies I'm referring to are fear and anger. Angry men and fearful men are not quality men. We all struggle with one or both of these tendencies.

Stop for a moment, and reflect on the reality of anger and fear in your life. How are these characteristics negatively displayed in your words and actions? To what degree can you admit to yourself that these two tendencies govern a lot of your decision-making?

Acting like a man means getting victory over fear and anger. Both tendencies motivate us to self-protect, to insulate ourselves from hurt. With fear, we pull back. We fall into passive behavior. But with anger we strike out. We act with aggression. In both instances the path to victory is found in the power of Christ in us to courageously choose faith over fear, compassion over anger, and forgiveness over hurt. How much good is left undone by failing to act like a quality man and conquer your fears? How much damage is suffered by those you love when you fail to act like a quality man and conquer your anger?

Take a moment to be quiet before God. Ask Him to help you clearly see how much you allow anger and fear to control your life. In the space below, write what God brings to mind.

Now thank Him for His presence in your life that empowers you to live differently. Ask Him to help you continually take steps to let Him, rather than your anger or fear, guide your life.

FOLLOW-THROUGH 3: *MAN UP*

Doing reps of physical activities, such as practicing a golf swing over and over or shooting lots of free throws, builds muscle memory. Such practice will allow you to perform an action well in a match or game because you have done it so many times before in practice. Similarly, memorizing and meditating on Scripture prepares you to recall and apply the Word of God in critical situations. You will have considered the Word carefully and filled yourself with God's instructions. The Holy Spirit will then use that Scripture to guide, comfort, and correct you and to help you proclaim the gospel. That's why it's crucial to commit the key verses in this study to memory: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor. 16:13-14). Five short, pointed, clear commands—just like we need them: precise and memorable. There's an edge to this checklist. Its direct wording doesn't give us room for excuses or dodges.

Mark your place, then close this field manual for a moment. Try to say the memory verses out loud. Better yet, find someone to say them to. If you're alone, call up a friend. If you're doing this lesson in a public place, turn to someone nearby (maybe even a stranger) and ask that person if he or she would be willing to listen to you recite some Bible verses you're trying to memorize. Who knows what conversation might come from that exercise?

At the heart of these commands is the phrase we're focusing on this week: "Act like men." Or, as some might say, "Man up!" The phrase doesn't mean we should act in the Hollywood sense of the word. God doesn't want actors. God doesn't want posers or imposters. In this passage, the word *act* means *to conduct yourself*. You are to conduct yourself as a man in the way God defines manhood, not the way the world defines it. This truth needs to be heard in our day when men are so ridiculed and vilified. God needs godly, strong, courageous men.

The Lord said in the Book of Ezekiel, "And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall ... " (Ezek. 22:30). When God wants something done, He

gets a man. Or He gets a group of men. I'm challenging you to be the man God uses to get things done. So, act like a man!

What opportunities do you have right now in your marriage, your family, or your church to step up and act like a man?

If you can't think of any current opportunities for service, who could you talk to about what might be needed from you as a man of God in each of those categories?

One of the crucial lessons I've discovered in the decades I've been a pastor is that men need opportunities to connect and talk with one another. They need relationships and an environment in which they can let their guards down, stop pretending, and be transparent. Men are not failing for lack of content; men are struggling because they lack connectedness, accountability, and meaningful, mutual, motivational community relationships with other brothers in the Lord. It says in James 5:16a, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." I want to encourage you to stir up a heart of compassion for the other men in your group.

Now, considering James 5:16, anyone who knows the Gospels knows that only God can forgive sins. However, the reason we confess our sins into one another's ears is not because we think that we can forgive one another's sins. We confess our sins to one another to promote vulnerability, accountability, and assurance of forgiveness. Many men (including this writer, at times) wallow in shame and defeat because of a variety of things. So, we keep sin a secret. We hide in our shame. We isolate ourselves. But confessing our sins to one another helps pull us out of that hole. In honesty's light we're able to see that we all fail; we all struggle; we all need Christ. And we're better able to see the need to pray for one another so that we can be healed, changed, and free.

Here's what we know. When it comes to being vulnerable, men (*that would be you*) are more likely to open up with:

1. Assurance of *confidentiality*. If you can't hold in confidence what you hear from other men during this study, you may need to reconsider your participation.

2. Assurance of *mutuality*. As men begin to share, you need to say, "Dude, you can trust us with this. I know where you are." They need assurance of confidentiality and reciprocation. When a guy in your group confesses, "You can't believe what I'm struggling with." Don't respond, "Wow! I just have no idea what you're talking about. You're weird, man! We're going to have to get you into another group." There will be men in the group who desperately need—perhaps more so than you—to confidentially unburden their hearts and be assured of God's forgiveness. You can do that for them while they do the same for you.

   If you were assured of confidentiality and mutuality in your group, what would you need to discuss with other men?

   Pray for each of the guys in your group as you anticipate your next session together.

For more on **Act Like Men**, read *Act Like Men*, Section 1, pages 23-71.

NOTES